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Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSC-01 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 AGRE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3599

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 1022

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, EFIN, LI
SUBJECT: PERSONNEL CHANGES AT THE FINANCE MINISTRY

REF: 73 MONROVIA 3364

1. THE LIBERIAN AGE OF FEBRUARY 8, 1977, REPORTED THE COMMISSIONING FEBRUARY 2 OF MRS. ELLEN JOHNSON-SIRLEAF AS DEPUTY MINISTER OF FINANCE FOR FISCAL AFFAIRS AND BANKING, AND MRS. FLORENCE CHENOWETH AS SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE MINISTER OF FINANCE ON AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS.

2. COMMENT: MRS. SIRLEAF RESIGNED AS ASSISTANT MINISTER OF FINANCE FOR FISCAL AFFAIRS IN JUNE 1973 BECAUSE OF FRUSTRATION WITH THE GOL BUREAUCRACY AND PERSONAL DIFFERENCES WITH THEN FINANCE MINISTER STEPHEN TOLBERT, PARTICULARLY OVER LAXITY ON THE PART OF THE MINISTRY IN ENFORCING TAX OBLIGATIONS OF CERTAIN PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE ELITE. DURING HER 18 MONTHS IN THE FINANCE MINISTRY, THIS EMBASSY CONSIDERED HER PROBABLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE CIVIL SERVANT IN THE GOL (SEE REFTEL).
MRS. SIRLEAF WAS CONSIDERED BY EMBASSY OFFICERS TO BE A STRONG NATIONALIST, RESENTFUL OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM IN LIBERIA, AND PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF THE DUBIOUS STANDARDS OF PERSONAL AND FISCAL HONESTY WHICH CHARACTERIZED IT. HER REPUTATION FOR HIGH STANDARDS OF PERSONAL HONESTY, OUTSPOKENNESS AND HER OBVIOUS
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AFFINITY FOR THE IDEALS OF LIBERIAN YOUTH MADE HER ONE OF THE MAJOR FIGURES IN THE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN LIBERIA. ACCORDING TO THE AUGUST-SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1975 EDITION OF THE REVOLUTION, OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE OF LIBERIA BASED IN THE UNITED STATES, MRS. SIRLEAF WAS "COMMISSIONED BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE OF LIBERIA TO PREPARE DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS COVERING A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT ARE

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INCIDENTAL TO THE MOVEMENT OF SOME PAL CADRES INTO LIBERIA IN THE FUTURE."

3. MRS. SIRLEAF IS THE SISTER OF THE WIFE OF MINISTER OF HEALTH ESTRADA BERNARD. BERNARD TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER DECEMBER 17, 1976, THAT HIS WIFE HAD BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN PERSUADING MRS. SIRLEAF TO RETURN TO LIBERIA TO WORK FOR THE GOL. IT IS PROBABLE THAT MRS. SIRLEAF RECEIVED ASSURANCES THAT SHE WOULD BE GIVEN A MUCH FREER HAND IN MANAGING FISCAL AFFAIRS AT THE MINISTRY AS DEPUTY MINISTER THAN SHE HAD THREE YEARS AGO AS ASSISTANT MINISTER. PRESIDENT TOLBERT'S CRITICISMS IN HIS SIXTH ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE LEGISLATURE ON JANUARY 28, 1977, OF EVASIONS OF FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY BY "APPARENTLY RESPECTABLE CITIZENS" AND HIS WARNINGS AGAINST KEY AGENCIES OF GOVERNMENT WHICH STRIVE "SELFISHLY FOR PERSONAL GAIN AT THE EXPENSE OF TOTAL BENEFIT TO THE NATION" SEEM TO INDICATE THAT TOLBERT HIMSELF SINCERELY DESIRES GENUINE IMPROVEMENT AT THE FINANCE MINISTRY. IT IS CERTAIN THAT MRS. SIRLEAF WILL DEMAND REFORMS. IT IS EQUALLY CERTAIN THAT SOME LONG-TIME MEMBERS OF THE ELITE WILL RESIST THEM. THE OUTCOME OF THE ANTICIPATED STRUGGLE BETWEEN THESE TWO FORCES WILL DETERMINE THE LENGTH OF TENURE OF SIRLEAF'S PRESENT APPOINTMENT WITH THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE.

4. MRS. CHENOWETH HAS AN M.A. IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN AND HAS BEEN ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATION AT THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE SINCE 1972. MRS. CHENOWETH IS CONSIDERED HIGHLY ABLE BY USAID OFFICIALS WHO HAVE WORKED WITH HER.
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Message Attributes

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Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
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